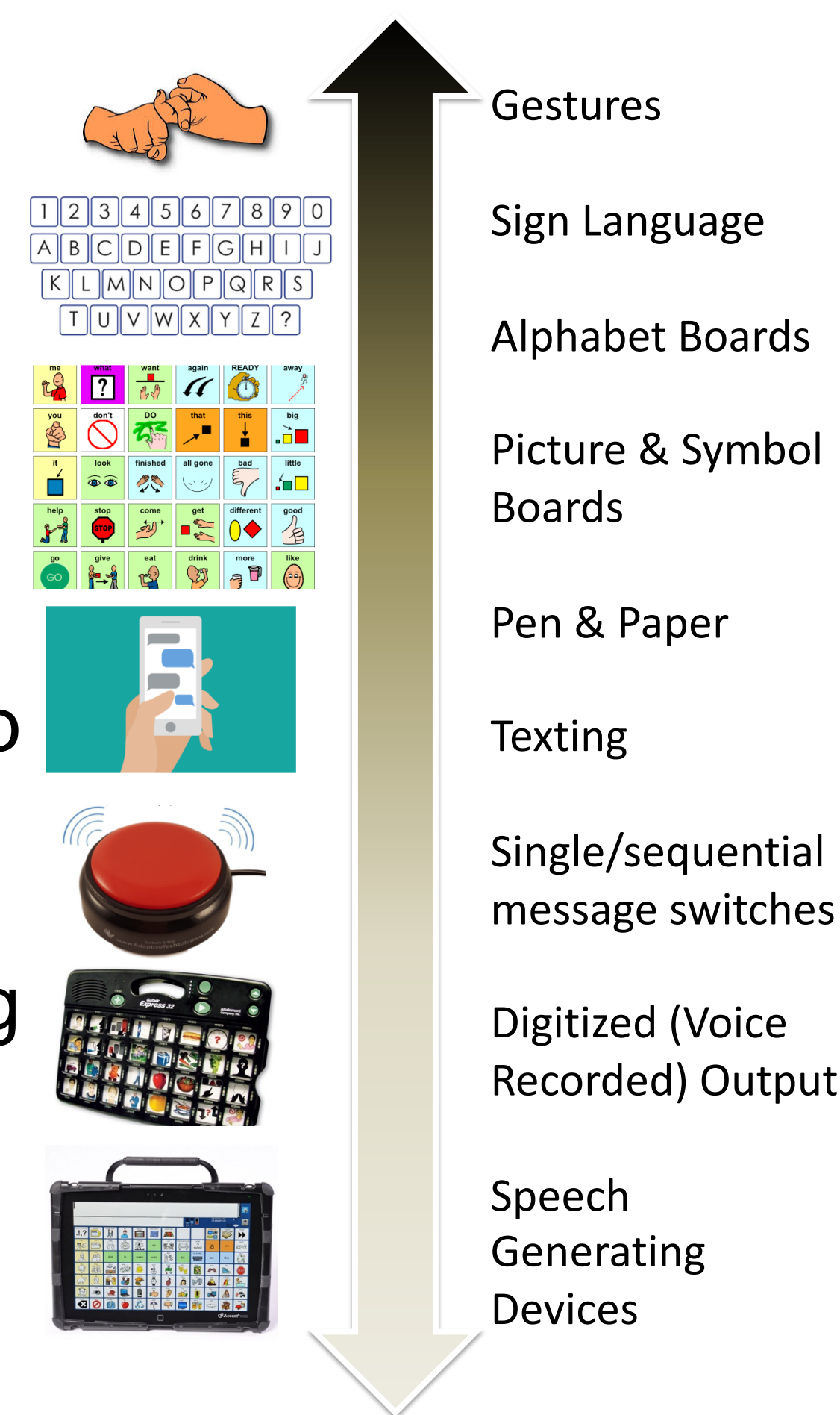


# Creating Community Partners for Individuals Who Use Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) Through Awareness

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## AUGMENTATIVE AND ALTERNATIVE COMMUNICATION (AAC)

- Augmentative and Alternative Communication (AAC) – can be unaided (e.g., gestures, ASL, facial expressions, etc.) or aided (e.g., phone, PECS, iPad, communication boards) along a continuum of low-tech to high-tech devices
- Durable medical equipment – Specification for medical funding
  - Speech Generating Device (SGD) – Dedicated AAC devices that are acquired through a funding source voice output (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013)
- Allow people to communicate when speech is limited (Beukelman & Mirenda, 2013)
- In emergency situations, people with complex communication needs have to:
  - Self-identify
  - Be involved in preventative and contingency planning
  - Advocate (where we come in)
  - Prepare with supplies (Goldman et al., 2018)



## IMPORTANCE AT A PERSONAL LEVEL

- AAC is a continuum; everyone uses some form of it
- Knowing how to interact with a person who uses it as their primary mode of communication empowers all individuals to be active members of their community



## IMPORTANCE AT A BUSINESS LEVEL

- Individuals with disabilities are often not identified before, during, or after an emergency.
  - As a result, people with disabilities may fail to receive a range of services, including their basic entitlements to food, water, shelter, and clothing
- 33% of ICU patients are unable to use speech (Hurtig, 2018)
- Joint Commission on Accreditation of Healthcare Organizations standards states:
  - “The organization respects the patient’s right to and need for communication.”
  - “The organization addresses the needs of those with vision, speech, hearing, language, and cognitive impairments” (JACHO, 2010, p.21)
- Addressing communication barriers can lead to:
  - 681,440 fewer adverse events annually
  - \$6.8 billion cost reduction in care (Hurtig, 2018)
- Ignoring the problem leads to:
  - Misunderstanding and frustration
  - Negative emotions of futility and dehumanization
  - Poor medical outcomes – statistic with adverse events

## AAC AWARENESS EVENT

- Address the need to establish communication at the first stage of a crisis situation
- Provide evidence-based solution for families and professionals
- Give opportunity to interact with AAC devices
- Further partnerships in the community



## STRATEGIES TO COMMUNICATE

- Remember there are several reasons for communicating: sharing opinions, asking questions, social exchanges, descriptive commenting
  - Provide opportunities for your partner to express all of these
- Pause and wait; be patient!
  - If you do pause, pause expectantly in a way that allows the AAC user to take their communication turn if they desire
  - Give the user at least 15 seconds
- Consider how to give prompts to the AAC user
- Consistently respond to AAC users
- Ask before touching the device
- Engage and interact with the person
- Acknowledge all attempts at communication
- Attribute meaning to what the AAC user says
- Ask them to “tell me” or “say it” if you are asking them to say something, not “show me”
- Be patient. Give them an opportunity to join the conversation

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